

Nai-Talim : Blueprint of the Desirable Tomorrow

Dr. Nisha Dubey, Asst. Prof.(English), Rajeev Gandhi Govt. College Simga, Balodabazar-Bhatapara, C.G. India. nisha21.06dubey@gmail.com

Abstract - The Gandhian outlook towards education was not the one emerging out of old rugged books but from the fresh breeze of fields and countryside. It dwells on the principle to grow food than to procure it from other means. Education for him was an overall development of persona who stays in the path of truth even in the unprecedented conditions. After so many years of our Independence we need to turn our heads back to remember our own indegenious, self sufficient mode of education which had all potentials to lead us towards the 'Horn of Plenty' in our own land. This is long cherished dream and its adaptation will be our 'Experiments with Truth'.

Key words : Gandhi, Nai -Talim, Primary Education, Rural education, Self dependence, Tagore

I. THE FOUNDATION STONE

"I had always given the first place to the culture of the heart and the building of character," Gandhiji wrote. He believed that the intimate relationships found at home are the foundation of all social and moral education, and this is the only thing important. He always preferred liberty over learning. It was at Tolstoy farm, Gandhi laid the path of "a true system of education" which would fulfill his idea of *Hind Swaraj*.

"Right from the beginning, Gandhiji was clear about three things: the children should live at home, they should not be separated from their parents and sent to a residential school; they should learn in their own mother-tongue; they should not have any privileges which other Indian children could not share." (Skyies, *The Story of Nai Talim*, 7)

II. NAI-TALIM

Arriving to India Gandhiji was shocked by the pitiable condition of the education available for Indians. It was completely bookish and required cramming for unnecessary reasons. The British education system made students reluctant from the manual labour. This was quite intolerable to Gandhi. He stood in opposition to the British Education system which was trying to make students believe that only medals and mark-sheets are the prized possession and one should quest for it only. Other eminent like Jyotirao Phule to Voelkar to N.G. Mukerjee, also critiqued the too-much weightage given on theoretical aspect of British Education policy.

"Nevertheless, it is found that the tendency of education at the present time is to draw the rising generation away from the land, and to give a purely literary training, which ends in a young man making his aim the obtaining of a post under Government, or the following of the profession of a "pleader" in the courts." (Voelkar, *Report' on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture*, 379)

We could easily feel the resentment of Gandhi in Hind Swaraj written against the Maculayan system of education. This Macaulayan system of education was making generating generations of slaves in India. It was not just 'Educational' but a 'civilizational' conflict. Gandhi

strongly detested the wild garb of 'curriculum' and 'knowledge' supplying only 'official codification' of education, under the British rule. This newly promoted system of education was less flexible and homogenized and was way away from the earlier periods of comparatively fluid, heterogeneous and diversified forms of indigenous education. This new approach was turning destructive and degenerative.

"In addition, there was an uninteresting and uninspiring curriculum, with an emphasis on books and book- learning, a lack of proper equipment and finance. With poverty looming large, there was hardly any encouragement for parents to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home." (Oosterheld, *Education and Social Change in South Asia*, 158)

There was withdrawal of children from school, before the completion of the primary stage, although primary education saw an increase from 1922 to 1927. Gandhi was tormented and stated the following at Chatham House in London on October 20, 1931

"This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our state would revive the old village schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls." Therefore Gandhi devised an educational scheme for all: the rich and the poor, the 'high' and the 'low', the young and the old, the employed and the unemployed. It was an everyday programme involving spinning, weaving, knitting and learning as well as earning. "It was a total movement because it was not confined to education alone, but involved politics, society, economy, religion and culture." (Sabyasachi. *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India*, 296)

Etymologically, the word "education" is derived from the Latin *ēducātiō* ("A breeding, a bringing up, a rearing") from *ēducō* ("I educate, I train") which is related to the homonym *ēdūcō* ("I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect") from *ē-* ("from, out of") and *dūcō* ("I lead, I conduct"). The substitution Gandhi provided against colonial system of education by his Wardha scheme was a part

of his endeavor of total upliftment of his people. In his Essay 'My Magical School' by Dr. Abhay Bang recalls his childhood learning process at Sevagram Ashram near Wardha. He tells fascinating story of his school running on the principals of Nai Talim. He says

"Our childhood was so different. Things have changed beyond recognition." Education should not be confined within the four walls of classroom mugging up boring subjects away from the Mother Nature... We learnt all of this in a very playful manner without the tags of language, music or philosophy attached to them."

III. GANDHI WITH TAGORE

Gandhi met Tagore at Shantiniketan on February 1915 after reaching India. Both these contemporaries happened to be educational thinkers as well.

"Two eminent contemporaries of Gandhi, Tagore and Gijubhai, devoted themselves to building institutional models where teaching with the child's consent and participation would be the norm." (Kumar, *Listening to Gandhi, in his What is Worth Teaching?* 115)

They both agreed and disagreed on different matters and their ideas were churned out of the same backdrop and experiences. For both of them the colonial system of education, was segregative and bookish. They combinedly condemned British system of education as 'sinful, discriminatory and racist'. Tagore's experience at the Bengal Academy, a Eurasian institution, that the schools were no more centres of education for children. Moreover they were no better than prison houses for them. "What we were taught there we never understood, nor did we make any attempt to learn, nor did it seem to make any difference to anybody that we did not." (Tagore, *My Reminiscence*, 60) As per his own experience the likes and dislikes of the child's mind, was completely ignored and they were forced to get knowledge in English that was totally a foreign language. Gandhi also maintained the same thing. "English has been made medium of education in all the highest branches of learning's and has created a permanent gulf or barrier between the highly educated few and the uneducated many." (Gandhi, M.K. *A New approach to Teaching and Education in emerging Indian Society*, 302)

Tagore's literary work gives a glimpse of ideas of many great scholars like Rousseau, and Dewey in his writings. He himself wrote more than 100 pieces on education.

We can easily understand from his writings, that his educational feelings had three 'life centres', namely, the first is the individual, second is the community, and the third is nature. For him the best education will be given in *tapovan* close to nature where children can be themselves. "Making the surrounding beautiful and healthy and disciplined community living should become a natural way of life." (Prasad, *Philosophy of Education and Painting*, 46) As per Rabindranath, simple life is a creative life. The joy experienced in making things is much greater. True education cannot be gained in the ambience of affluence and in absence of hard work. The way of life should be such that, life itself becomes education. True education can be received in surroundings of intended scarcity. Speaking in

the tones of *Gurukul Parampara* Rabindranath in his essay 'My School' wrote ".....should we not admit that poverty is the school in which man had his first lessons and his best training." Hence this 'harsh' place was the ideal one for Rabindranath's Santiniketan.

Gandhi was also akin with Tagore. It was no wonder that both of them turned out ardent critique of colonial system of education. "The demand for an education system different from the one introduced by the colonial power was, from the very beginning, an integral part of India's freedom struggle." (Oosterheld, *Education and Social Change in South Asia*, 156) There was an unavoidable urge for building the national system that leads to the development of the educational ideals. Education has to become a part of the ethics. People like Rousseau, Tagore and Gandhi, believed that rural life was more suitable for the purpose of education. They both desired the free space, nearness to nature and the students indulged in physical work. Gandhi adhered to the cult of productive work and true to his nature, he upheld the culture of work. Philosophically he disapproved the machine civilization, particularly, its exploitative and consumerist characters.

"In order to restore India to its pristine condition, we have to return to it. In our own civilization there will naturally be progress, retrogression, reforms, and reactions; but one effort is required, and that is to drive out Western civilization." (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 87)

"In fact, the daily domestic life activity was not separated from such education system." (Chattopadhyay, *On Education And Rabindranath*, 109) The education which adds to the strength of the living legs is really 'blessed'. Education should become a vehicle via which the child's mind and body are able to keep in harmony with the rhythm of nature. In the essay 'The Problem of Education', Rabindranath wrote, "The aim of the Creator was to make child's education a process of playful learning in the generous atmosphere in the universe." They wanted to make education as the combination which takes care of, both, heart and head.

Both Tagore and Gandhi wanted to give students as much responsibility as possible so that they can be protected enough from the course of the detestable habit of complaining and become more self-reliant. If the students succeed in their efforts, they turn to be brave and will not become restless while experiencing pain. This will also not experience carving towards wealth, will not hate death, and will always be in search for truth, and lastly will keep falsehood away from their mind, speech and work. Gandhi requested not to overload students by books as it would be unfeasible for a country like India. "By cramming text books even a dead soul can pass examinations in first division and reach the highest position professionally." (Prasad, *Philosophy of Education and Painting*, 49) Education can be successfully imparted by understanding childhood and giving oneself totally in love and union with it.

In 1921, Gandhi wrote in *Young India* about the desirable scheme of education which he predicted would supplement three purposes, namely, to make education self-supporting, train the bodies of the children as well as their minds, and pave the way for a complete boycott of foreign yarn and

cloth. Gandhi once wrote that the Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country. His emphasis was that education should be imparted in the mother tongue. "To give millions knowledge of English is to enslave them." (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 84)

Gandhi would not allow teaching English till a student was 14 years old. Even afterwards not all students should learn English. In fact, there is no place for English in his scheme of education called '*Nai Talim*'. His idea of village-based economy and work-based education were conceived as alternative course for the future of humanity. Gandhi's philosophy was of 'Bread Labour' where you toil to get your own food.

"The demand for education in the mother-tongue was not new; Rabindranath Tagore had voiced forcefully and demonstrated it practically for at least forty years. But it was now put forward in the context of a complete village-centered plan for national education." (Skyies, *The Story of Nai Talim*, 15).

Gandhi and Tagore was product of same times, with personal similarities and differences. "It may be true as has been put by a scholar, that Tagore treaded on the '*bhakti marg*', while Gandhi opted for '*karma marg*'." (Acharya, *Educational Ideals of Tagore and Gandhi: A Comparative Study*, 605) Both were deeply concerned regarding the embarrassment suffered by Indians under the British rule. They wanted to ignite in Indians a love for India, their mother tongue and encourage good administration and social relations. They thought for the alternate route. Vinobha Bhawe once mentioned that a new *talim* is required for a new country.

IV. THEORY AND PRACTICE

Right from mid 1937 onward, Gandhi started thinking of restructuring Indian education and published his views in a series of articles in *The Harijan*. In October 1937, he summoned an All India Educational Conference at Wardha, in which he invited some well-known educationists associated with institutions of national education as well as the ministers in charge of the education in the provisional governments run by the Congress. The emphasis was on a 'self-sufficient' and 'craft-centered' educational scheme. It was one of Gandhi's highly practical approaches to the actual situation where the required amount of money for the introduction of mass education was not available. Gandhi described his educational scheme as one which '*would be rural national education through village handicrafts*'. He tried to make the villages' self-dependent, as they were during the pre-colonial times.

A small committee of educationists under the chairmanship of Zakir Husain prepared a primary education scheme keeping in mind the broad outlines given by Gandhi and in December 1937, a syllabus was submitted under the title 'Basic National Education' also known as the Wardha Scheme. The Wardha scheme became the first blueprint of a comprehensive system of universal, free, and compulsory education on a national scale.

"Fundamentally, a democratic conception, it provided education to all children, admitting them in the same school irrespective of their caste or creed without any substantial difference in the instruction of boys and girls and in the standard of education between village and town." (Oesterheld, *Education and Social Change in South Asia*, 160).

With the target of producing socially and educationally useful work, this course tried to overcome the fake differences between the mental and the manual work. The medium of instruction was the 'mother-tongue of the children' during the 'first years at school'. Thus the Wardha Scheme aimed at educating students on the basis of their natal culture and building attitudes which deemed mandatory for building a democratic society. "Gandhi would often concede that knowledge of western science and literature might be a good thing, but only as long as it was acquired in the vernaculars." (Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, 178)

V. EVALUATION

As observers remarked, the Wardha Scheme was much advanced and the educational policy based on it was the most enlightening and encouraging feature of the new regime, and it also faced the bitterest attacks. "The plan of basic education known as the Wardha Scheme was to become a genuine challenge to and the most significant dissent against the essential form and the structure of schooling and education being built around British rule in India." (Oesterheld, *Education and Social Change in South Asia*, 158) "Educational ideals of Gandhi are implicit in his concept of Swaraj." (Acharya, *Educational Ideals of Tagore and Gandhi: A Comparative Study*, 603) Gandhi once wrote if a choice was to be made between liberty and learning, the former has to be preferred.

Gandhi took the boldest attempt so far made to solve the great problem of India's illiteracy for the village through Wardha scheme which made schools self supporting. "Gandhi correctly believed that children from laboring families work willingly to help their parents, to make both ends meet." (Acharya, *Educational Ideals of Tagore and Gandhi: A Comparative Study*, 604) Gandhiji was already advocating in these talks two of his major themes:

Firstly, the whole of general education up to the "matriculation" standard should be treated as one integrated unit, to be given in the village schools and by the medium of mother tongue of the pupils. The course duration should be of seven or eight years' beginning at the age of seven.

Secondly, this course should include the practice of a useful productive handicraft which would enable the schools to be self-supporting.

"In summary, the idea of traditional handicrafts providing an axis for the school's daily curriculum had in it the following elements which formed its rationale:

- Bridging the school with the world of work.
 - Imparting an activity orientation to the curriculum.
 - Inculcating a sense of self reliance"
- (Kumar, *Listening to Gandhi, in his What is*

Worth Teaching? ,114)

The scheme of universal and compulsory basic education was based on Gandhi's insistence on autonomy which translates into freedom from dependence on any single option. He believed in local self reliance. He wanted that students should love and respect nature. And this was not something that was new. Rousseau in the 18th century wrote in his Emile, that the child must be a pupil of Nature. "His Emile was taught by the real things of life, by observation and experiences: he was to learn nothing from books, much by experience having read deeply in the book of Nature." (Richey, *Evidence of Officers Serving under Government of India*,41) Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi followed Nature. Spencer was of the opinion that the child should be trained in things in which it is interested. The teacher's duty was largely to keep in sympathetic touch with the child and to foster its interest in natural things and to allow it to learn by the experiences of life- this being the way in which the young mind is developed.

VI. ADAPTATION

Recently Union HRD Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar released the curriculum on Experiential Learning – Gandhi is Nai Talim in New Delhi. This curriculum was brought out simultaneously in 13 languages i.e., Assamese, Tamil, Bengali, Odiya, Kannada, Malayalam, Punjabi, Marathi, Telugu, Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi and English in consultation with the state councils of educational research and training along with the universities in the country. Speaking on the occasion the Minister said that we would like to take experiential learning to all levels of education involving all states and all stakeholders. He said that the Gandhiji's Nai Talim or basic education was a holistic approach of developing body, mind and soul (hand, head and heart), by making a productive art, craft or community engagement activity as the centre of learning. Gandhiji said "by education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man-body, mind and spirit", said the Minister. On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's upcoming 150th birth anniversary celebrations, a movement is on across the educational institutions in the country to promote Nai Talim, Work Education and Experiential Learning. A special effort is on school and teacher education in the areas of work education and experiential learning through the education departments of Universities as well as Central and State Governments and the SCERTs.

VII. CONCLUSION

"Gandhiji has secured a unique place in the galaxy of the great teachers who have brought fresh light in the field of Education". (Saxena, *Education emerging in Indian society*,167)

The far- sighted leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who whole- heartedly and devotedly tried to solve the question of evolving a system of education which will be in harmony with the genius of the Indian people, and solve the problem of mass education in a practicable way and within as short a time as possible. Gandhi's educational scheme tried to do away the sense of inferiority which was injected into the mind of 'native Indians'. "The demand for an educational system different from the one introduced by the colonial power was, from the very beginning, an integral part of

India's struggle." (Oesterheld, . *Education and Social Change in South Asia*, 156) Knowledge will thus become related to life, and its various aspects will be correlated with one another. For Gandhi's the school was an institutionalized forum of the community in which, the literacy of the whole personality should take place. It is this belongingness which needs to be injected the blood of new India so that they return to their roots and affirm them more strongly in the growing and daily changing Global scenario. Moreover we have to teach our kids to walk on any road than to make roads for them.

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